



# St. Thomas of Canterbury: His Death and Miracles

## Vol. I

*Edwin A. Abbott*

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From the Preface.

In the course of preparing a critical commentary on the Four Gospels, it became necessary to consider other instances of documents relating the same fact in different language, as the Gospels relate in different language the acts and words of Christ.

A brief glance at the *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket* published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, at once suggested extracts likely to afford useful illustrations. But afterwards, when more closely studied, those volumes seemed to present parallelisms to problems of New Testament criticism so exact and so helpful that, instead of forming a few paragraphs in the proposed work, the extracts and notes grew, first into a chapter, and then into a separate section.

Up to this point, the audience in view being mainly students of theology, all extracts had been kept in their original Latin. But when it became needful to quote passages from the two books composed by Benedict and William of Canterbury on the *Miracles of St. Thomas*, many of the narratives seemed so fresh and interesting, so full of touches of perennial human nature, and often so instructive as to a past in danger of being forgotten, yet not to be forgotten without danger—that a change of front was made, so as to give the text in English as well as in Latin, thus throwing everything open to the general reader while retaining all that was of use for the student.

The result has been that the "few paragraphs" have grown into a book of considerable size, and probably a book in which several blemishes of detail may be detected, owing, partly to the method of its evolution, and still more to the want of leisure for doing full justice to the subject. But on this last point there was no alternative. The claims of the main object did not allow time for more than this incidental excursion. Errors and imperfections in this somewhat hasty translation of ecclesiastical Latin will not (it is hoped) prevent the unlearned reader from deriving from it a fairly accurate notion of Becket's Miracles; and learned critics may forgive much to one who has given them, in almost every case of doubt or difficulty, the means of judging for themselves—by setting before them the original documents so classified as to save them a great deal of trouble, and so annotated as never to pass over any point that appeared open to question.

It will be readily understood that, in this enlarged and separate form, the work rarely touches on New Testament criticism. Nevertheless the author is not without hope that it may be of some indirect service to theologians of all schools, in so far as all are, or ought to be, students of evidence. One reason why the criticism of the Gospels oscillates much, and progresses little, is that there has been little systematic study of other similar documents such as may be called Synoptic (like our first three Gospels) or Supplementary (like our fourth). On this subject, a vast superfluity of opinions coexists with a paucity of arranged materials for forming opinions, and with an almost complete absence of recognized rules of criticism. The object of this treatise, so far as it bears on theology, is to supply a store of classified facts that no reasonable critic can afford to despise.

The translations of the extracts from Garnier's *Vie de Saint Thomas le Martir* have been revised by Mr. H. Symons, B.A., formerly Scholar of Wadham College, Oxford, Assistant in the Department of Printed Books in the British Museum. To him I am also indebted for the quotations from Godefroy bearing on points of

difficulty; and without his aid I should not have ventured on publishing my attempts at a literal rendering of the original. The *Étude Historique* on Gamier by E. Étienne (Paris, 1883) did not come to my notice till the first volume of this work was in type.

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